

1776-2026 AN AMERICAN SEASON

The Château de Versailles Celebrates the 250th Anniversary of American Independence

Versailles, 2 June 2026
Presse Release

From summer 2026, to mark the 250th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence, the Château de Versailles will present an exceptional programme dedicated to the historical, diplomatic and artistic ties that have united France and the United States since the eighteenth century. A new gallery devoted to the American War of Independence and the role played by Versailles in that conflict, an immersive experience at the Pavillon d'Orléans, the 4 July Grandes Eaux Nocturnes, a historical reenactment at Trianon, a concert and a study day: this American season will highlight the central role of the Château de Versailles in the birth of the American Republic and in the dissemination of Enlightenment ideals that profoundly shaped Atlantic history.

A NEW GALLERY AT THE HEART OF FRANCO-AMERICAN HISTORY Apartment of the Capitaine des Gardes - from 4 July 2026

As the seat of royal power and the nerve centre of European diplomacy, the Château de Versailles was one of the principal stages in the birth of the United States. It was here that Louis XVI received Benjamin Franklin and, in 1778, formally recognized the sovereignty of the United States, officially committing France to the conflict alongside the American insurgents against Great Britain, a war that had begun in 1775. It was also at Versailles that one of the treaties ending the war was signed in 1783, confirming the entry of the young American Republic into the community of nations.

On 4 July 2026, to mark the 250th anniversary of the United States Declaration of Independence, the Château de Versailles will restore this shared history to its rightful place by inaugurating a new gallery dedicated to the American Revolutionary War and the role played by France in it. Installed in the Captain of the Guards' Apartment, at the heart of the palace, the display will bring together paintings, sculptures and portraits from the Versailles collections, highlighting the political, diplomatic and military figures of the conflict, as well as the ideals that inspired both the American and French Revolutions.

In doing so, it will revive a long-standing museum tradition: a gallery devoted to American Independence was first established at Versailles in the nineteenth century, and later reinstated after the Second World War, remaining on view until the 1980s.

Nicolas-André Monsiau, "Louis XVI Giving His Instructions to La Pérouse, 26 June 1785", 1817, oil on canvas. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin.



Théodore Gudin, René-Robert Cavelier de La Salle's Expedition to Louisiana, 1839-1844, oil on canvas. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin.

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FRANCE AND AMERICA UNDER THE ANCIEN RÉGIME

The gallery will first explore the ties that united France and America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the colonisation of territories such as Acadia, Canada and Louisiana, as well as through the importation of goods that fuelled Europe's fascination with the New World. Jean-Baptiste Oudry's *Still Life with a Bust of America* (1722) reflects the idealised vision of the American continent, then associated with exoticism and abundance. Following the Seven Years' War and the loss of most French possessions in North America, support for the American insurgents came to be seen as both a political and strategic response to British dominance. The visitor route will place particular emphasis on the diplomacy conducted from Versailles. The gallery will notably feature portraits of Benjamin Franklin, whose arrival in France in 1778 left a lasting impression, and of the Comte de Vergennes, Louis XVI's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and one of the principal architects of French support for the American insurgents. The encounter between these two figures symbolises the rapprochement between the French monarchy and the American revolutionaries, formalised in February 1778 with the signing of the treaties of friendship, commerce and alliance between France and the United States.

Jean-Baptiste Descamps, *France Offering Liberty to America*, 1783–1789, oil on canvas. © Grand Palais RMN (Château de Blérancourt) © Gérard Blot.



Among the works on display, Jean-Baptiste Descamps's *France Offering Liberty to America* (1783–1789) reflects the political, economic and ideological ambitions underpinning French support for the American cause. France's victory alongside the insurgents enabled Louis XVI to restore French naval prestige and strengthen control over maritime routes. It was in this context that the La Pérouse expedition was launched in 1785, an undertaking illustrated by Nicolas-André Monsiau's monumental painting *Louis XVI Giving His Instructions to La Pérouse* (1817).

A GALLERY DEDICATED TO THE MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC FIGURES OF THE CONFLICT

The second section of the gallery will focus on the military campaigns of the War of Independence and on the leading French and American figures who contributed to the achievement of independence. It will highlight the early commitment of young French officers who fought alongside the revolutionaries, foremost among them the Marquis de Lafayette, who became one of the enduring symbols of Franco-American friendship.

Portraits and maritime paintings will retrace the major stages of the conflict. Visitors will discover works devoted to General Washington, the Comte de Rochambeau, Vice Admiral d'Estaing, the Comte de Bougainville and the Comte de Grasse, whose actions during the naval battle in Chesapeake Bay in September 1781 dealt a decisive blow to the British fleet and paved the way for the Franco-American victory at Yorktown a few weeks later.

Other monumental paintings by Jean-Antoine-Théodore Gudin will illustrate the major naval engagements between the French and British fleets, underscoring the strategic importance of maritime warfare during the War of Independence. The gallery will also highlight the role of the French expeditionary force sent to America in 1780 under the command of the Comte de Rochambeau, operating in coordination with General Washington's troops.

Léopold Boilly, Marie-Joseph-Yves-Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834), 1788, oil on canvas. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fourn.



FROM ONE REVOLUTION TO ANOTHER

The third section of the gallery explores the return of peace, marked by the signing at Versailles on 3 September 1783 of one of the treaties that brought the war to an end. Now recognised on the international stage, the young American republic elected its first president, George Washington, in 1789. A copy of his first official portrait will be on display.

That same year, the French Revolution broke out. France's support for the American insurgents had contributed to the economic difficulties that hastened the fall of the monarchy. Inspired by Enlightenment thought, American Independence in turn helped to spread the ideals of liberty and republicanism. Figures such as Lafayette took part in the French Revolution and drew upon principles expressed in the American Declaration of Independence when shaping the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789.



George Washington (1732-1799), George Peter Alexander Healy d'après le *Portrait Lansdowne* de Gilbert Stuart, 1843 © RMN-GP (Château de Blérancourt)

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE DIVERSITY OF THE CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES COLLECTIONS

By bringing renewed visibility to this pivotal chapter in Franco-American history, the Château de Versailles also seeks to highlight the role played by Louis-Philippe in the creation of the Museum of the History of France, dedicated “to all the glories of France”. As early as 1837, several rooms of the museum already celebrated the heroes and events of the American War of Independence, reflecting the importance accorded to this history within the French national narrative.

The new gallery will offer visitors the opportunity to rediscover an exceptional group of works rarely brought together around this theme. History paintings, official portraits, sculptures and battle scenes will form a journey that is at once historical, diplomatic and artistic, tracing the relationship between France and the United States from the earliest voyages to the New World to the birth of the American Republic.



1. *John Paul Jones, Naval Officer (1747–1792)*, George Peter Alexander Healy after Charles Willson Peale, 1846–1847. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin - 2. *George Washington (1732–1799)*, George Peter Alexander Healy after Gilbert Stuart’s Lansdowne Portrait, 1843. © RMN-GP (Château de Blérancourt) © Gérard Blot - 3. *Charles Henri d’Estaing (1729–1788)*, Jean-Baptiste Le Brun, 1769. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin - 4. *Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811)*, Jean-Pierre Franque, 1839. © RMN-GP (Château de Versailles) © Gérard Blot - 5. *George III, King of Great Britain*, after Allan Ramsay, after 1762. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin - 6. *Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes (1719–1787)*, Antoine-François Callet, 1780. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin - 7. *François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse (1723–1788)*, Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse, 1842–1843. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin - 8. *Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau (1725–1807)*, Charles-Philippe Larivière, 1834. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin.

LIGHT OF LIBERTY

A Mixed-Reality Immersive Experience at the Pavillon d'Orléans — From 23 June

As part of the celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of American Independence, the Château de Versailles will also present a new mixed-reality immersive experience—combining the physical environment with interactive virtual elements—entitled *Light of Liberty*, on view at the Pavillon d'Orléans from 23 June.

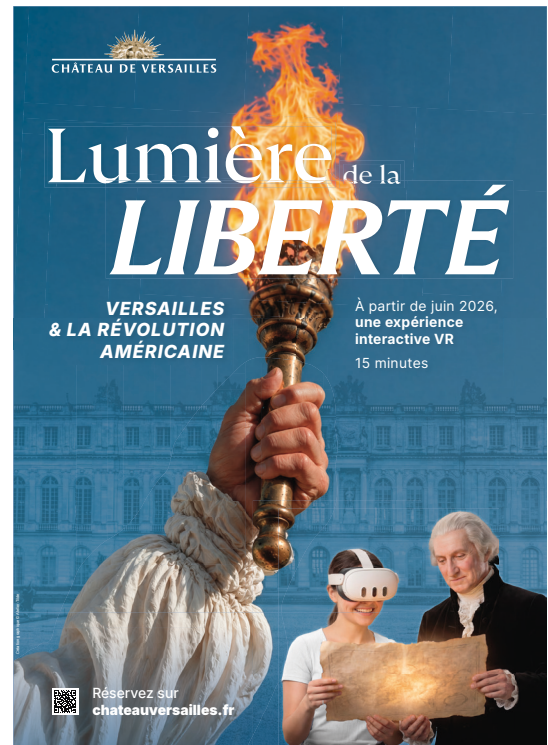
This original creation will invite visitors to relive the key moments of the American War of Independence and the Franco-American alliance through an interactive journey. Presented across several rooms of the Pavillon d'Orléans, located in the South Wing of the palace, the experience will offer an immersive walkthrough lasting approximately 13 minutes and will be available in both French and English.

Guided by the voice of the Marquis de Lafayette, visitors will journey through the major events that led to the birth of the United States: the ideals of the Enlightenment, the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin's diplomatic mission at Versailles, Louis XVI's support for the American insurgents, and the military campaigns that culminated in the victory at Yorktown in 1781.

The experience will allow visitors to witness Franklin's encounters with the court of Versailles, follow the military strategies of the Comte de Rochambeau and the Admiral de Grasse, and relive the Siege of Yorktown alongside French and American troops. Several interactive sequences will also invite visitors to handle historical objects, explore animated maps, command a fleet and embark aboard an eighteenth-century frigate.

By combining historical storytelling, virtual immersion and interactive engagement, *Light of Liberty* will offer a new way to discover the central role played by Versailles in the birth of the United States and in the dissemination of the ideals of liberty inherited from the Age of Enlightenment.

This experience is developed by the Château de Versailles with Yalla.Digital Inc. and produced by First Step Productions.



PODCAST «LAFAYETTE AND THE AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE» A historical fiction on Lafayette's Journey to America

To mark the 250th anniversary of American independence, the Château de Versailles is releasing a new original podcast. This historical fiction series, entitled Lafayette and American Independence, retraces the Marquis de Lafayette's journey at the heart of the American Revolutionary War. While Gilbert de Lafayette was fighting in America, his wife Adrienne remained in France. Through the letters exchanged between the couple from 1776 to 1784, a different perspective on the American Revolutionary War emerges: that of a woman who also played a historical yet little-known role in this revolution.

The podcast is available in both French and English on all major podcast platforms and on the Château de Versailles website.



Marie-Joseph-Yves-Gilbert du Mortier, marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834), Léopold Boilly, 1788, oil on canvas © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin

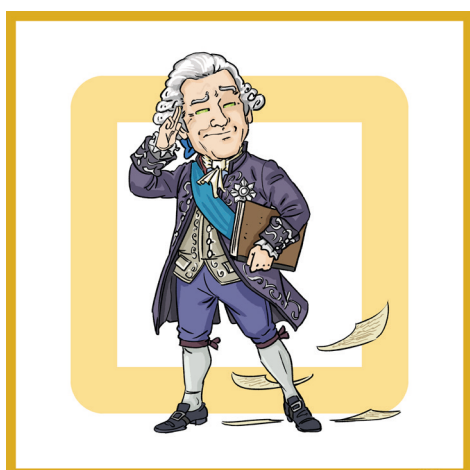
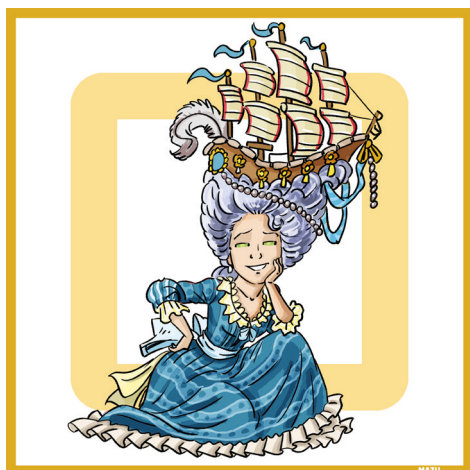
«CRYPTORS IN THE CITY» AT THE DOMAINE DE VERSAILLES

From 4 July

The Château de Versailles will partner with Cryptors in the City to offer a trail through the estate during which participants search for “cryptors”, ceramic tokens depicting four historical figures associated with Versailles: the Comte de Vergennes, the Comte de Rochambeau, Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. Once discovered, visitors photograph the cryptors to add them to their collection within the dedicated app and contribute to a wider collection of hundreds of characters linked to American Independence hidden throughout France.

After scanning a cryptor representing a historical figure, users gain access to cultural content, can take part in a quiz and then interact with the character through artificial intelligence. The aim of the game is to collect as many cryptors as possible and achieve the highest quiz score in order to climb the national leaderboard.

The Cryptors in the City app is available on Google Play and the App Store.



PUBLIC PROGRAMMES

European Heritage Days, Symposium and Educational Activities

The Château de Versailles will also present a rich programme of educational activities and public events exploring Franco-American history. European Heritage Days dedicated to Rue de l'Indépendance Américaine, guided tours, student-led interpretation, exceptional openings of historic sites in Versailles and a study day bringing together historians, specialists and figures involved in Franco-American relations will invite visitors to rediscover the many historical, diplomatic and cultural ties linking Versailles and the United States since the eighteenth century.

EUROPEAN HERITAGE DAYS 2026

10-20 September 2026

As part of the 43rd edition of the European Heritage Days and the celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of American Independence, the Château de Versailles will highlight the history of Rue de l'Indépendance Américaine and several of the landmark sites located along it, including the Grand Commun, the vestibule of the Congress Hall, the Hôtel de la Guerre, the municipal library and the Cour de Monsieur, with access to the ground floor of the Escalier de Provence.

These historic sites will exceptionally open their doors to the public, offering visitors the opportunity to discover the history of this Versailles street, whose name commemorates the long-standing ties between France and the United States. Visitors will be able to extend their itinerary to the King's Kitchen Garden via the Pièce d'Eau des Suisses.

The courtyard of the Grand Commun will be open to visitors, with interpretation activities led by students, while an exhibition devoted to the site's archives and archaeological excavations will be presented in the Le Nôtre Room.

Student-led interpretation activities will also be offered in the entrance vestibule of the Congress Hall, in the Cour de Monsieur and at the various sites along Rue de l'Indépendance Américaine that will be open during the heritage weekend.

GUIDED TOURS AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

General Public, School Groups & Priority Audiences

From 4 July 2026, regular guided tours of the Captain of the Guards' Apartment will be organised around the new gallery dedicated to the American War of Independence.

These tours will be offered on weekdays and weekends for the general public, school groups and priority audiences.

Information and bookings: chateauversailles.fr



Le Grand Commun et la rue de l'Indépendance américaine © Château de Versailles / T. Garnier

SYMPOSIUM

"THE UNITED STATES AND VERSAILLES: 250 YEARS OF SHARED HISTORY"

9 October 2026

As part of the celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of American Independence, the Château de Versailles will host a study day conceived as a dialogue between past and present, bringing together historical, political, institutional, cultural and philanthropic perspectives through lectures, testimonies and archival materials.

Adopting a chronological approach, historians, art historians and speakers from a variety of backgrounds will explore more than two centuries of relations between Versailles and the United States, from the influence of Enlightenment thought on the birth of the American Republic to the place of the Château de Versailles in the contemporary American imagination.

Discussions will address the role of major figures such as Lafayette, Vergennes, Franklin and Jefferson, as well as the history of American presidential state visits to Versailles and the cultural, diplomatic and heritage ties that have linked the two countries since the eighteenth century.

Open to all audiences.

Presentations will be delivered in French and English with simultaneous interpretation.

Free admission upon reservation: chateauversailles.fr

Jean-Antoine-Théodore Gudin, *Naval Battle off Ushant, 27 July 1778*, 1839, oil on canvas. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin.



CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES SPECTACLES PROGRAMME

Special Grandes Eaux Nocturnes, Historical Re-enactment and Concerts

GRANDES EAUX NOCTURNES: AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

An exceptional evening - 4 July 2026

On 4 July 2026, to mark the 250th anniversary of the United States Declaration of Independence and the American national holiday, the Château de Versailles will present a special edition of the Grandes Eaux Nocturnes dedicated to Franco-American friendship.

In the palace gardens, illuminated for the occasion, the evening will combine fountain displays, light effects and great Baroque music with a creation specially designed to celebrate American Independence. The event will culminate in an aerial ballet of drones and fireworks paying tribute to the colours of the American flag.



© Geoffrey Hubbel

AMERICA AND VERSAILLES: THE WAR OF LIBERTY

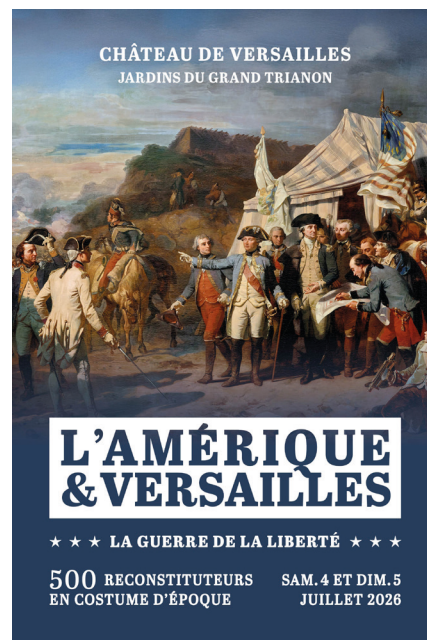
A Major Historical Re-enactment in the Gardens of the Grand Trianon - 4 and 5 July 2026

On 4 and 5 July, the Château de Versailles will host a major historical re-enactment devoted to the American War of Independence in the gardens of the Grand Trianon. Entitled America and Versailles: The War of Liberty, this unique event will invite visitors to immerse themselves in the atmosphere of eighteenth-century military camps and manoeuvres.

Over the course of the weekend, more than 500 historical re-enactors in period costume will occupy a vast encampment installed in the Trianon gardens, recreating, among other settings, Louis XVI's royal headquarters, an American insurgent camp and a British military encampment.

Visitors will be free to explore the various camps and meet history enthusiasts bringing uniforms, military practices and traditional trades back to life with a strong commitment to authenticity. Equestrian demonstrations, military drills, dances and concerts of period music will also animate the weekend.

The highlight of the event will be a large-scale battle re-enactment pitting American insurgents and French troops against the British Army in a spectacular recreation of the clashes of the War of Independence.



CONCERT AT THE OPÉRA ROYAL

Celebrating the Chevalier de Saint-George - 15 Octobre 2026

On 15 October 2026, the Royal Opera of the Château de Versailles will devote an exceptional evening to Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-George (1754–1799), composer, violinist and conductor of the second half of the eighteenth century.

An emblematic figure of the Enlightenment, the Chevalier de Saint-George was at once a virtuoso musician, a renowned fencer and a leading personality of Parisian musical life. Born in Guadeloupe, he remains one of the very few composers of colour identified in eighteenth-century Europe.

Conducted by Théotime Langlois de Swarte at the head of the Orchestre de l'Opéra Royal, the concert will bring together soprano Franciana Nogues, tenor Patrick Kabongo and baritone Anas Séguin in a programme devoted to rarely performed works by the Chevalier de Saint-George.

Through concert arias, orchestral works and vocal compositions, the evening will highlight the richness of the composer's writing, combining instrumental virtuosity, theatrical lyricism and classical elegance.

Information et booking : operaroyal-versailles.fr



Monsieur de Saint-George, portrait by Mather Brown, engraved by William Ward, 1787, after a painting from Mr Angelo's Fencing Academy. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Still Life with a Bust of America*, 1722, oil on canvas. © RMN-GP (Château de Versailles) © Gérard Blot.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

American Independence Gallery

- Opens on 4 July 2026
- Self-guided visit
- Accessible to visitors holding a Passport Ticket

Light of Liberty

Mixed-Reality Immersive Experience

- Opens on 23 June 2026
- Pavillon d'Orléans (access via the Cour des Princes)
- Flat rate: €7 for the experience only; Passport Ticket + €7
- Ages 8 and up
- Available in French and English

Grandes Eaux Nocturnes - 4 July

- Full price: €41
- Free for children under 3
- Reduced rates available for EEA nationals and for children aged 4-11 and 11-17

Historical Re-enactment

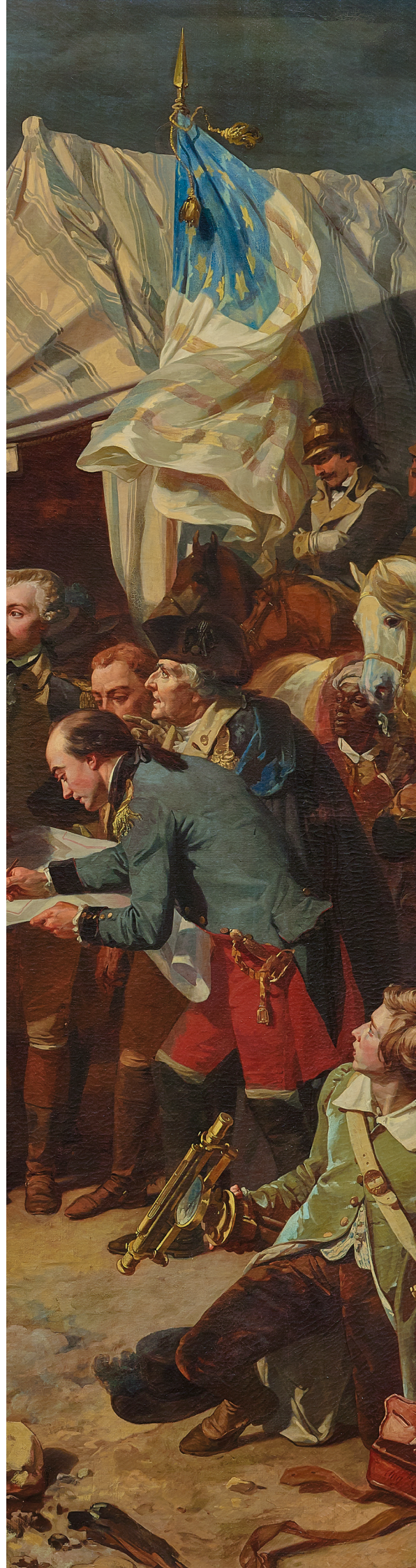
America and Versailles: The War of Liberty

- 4-5 July 2026
- Full price: €31
- Free for children under 3
- Reduced rates available for EEA nationals and for children aged 4-11 and 11-17

Concert

The Chevalier de Saint-George

- 15 October 2026
- from 23 to €125



Auguste Couder, *The Siege of Yorktown, 17 October 1781*, 1836, oil on canvas. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin.